

September 12, 2023

HEATHER COX RICHARDSON

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Members of the House of Representatives returned to work today after their summer break. They came back to a fierce fight over funding the government before the September 30 deadline, with only 12 days of legislative work on the calendar. That fight is also tangled up with Republican extremists' demands to impeach President Joe Biden—although even members of their own caucus admit there are no grounds for such an impeachment—and threats to the continued position of Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) as speaker of the House.

It's an omnishambles, a word coined in 2009 by the writers of the BBC political satire *The Thick of It*, meaning “a situation, especially in politics, in which poor judgment results in disorder or chaos with potentially disastrous consequences.”

It fits.

In August, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed 12 spending bills covering discretionary funding—about 27% of the budget—by bipartisan votes, within limits set as part of the deal Speaker McCarthy made with President Biden to prevent the U.S. defaulting for the first time in history.

But the House left for summer break without being able to pass more than one of the 12 necessary bills. The extremists in the House Freedom Caucus oppose the spending levels Biden and McCarthy negotiated, insisting they amount to “socialism,” although with the exception of the Covid-19 blip, discretionary federal spending has stayed level at about 20% of the nation's gross domestic product since 1954.

The Republican-dominated House Appropriations Committee has reneged on the deal

McCarthy struck, producing bills that impose cuts far beyond those McCarthy agreed to. In particular, it cut Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for programs to address climate change and the Internal Revenue Service, which has been badly underfunded since at least 2010, leaving wealthy tax cheats unaudited. The cuts are ideological: the bills have cut funding for food assistance programs for pregnant mothers and children, grants to school districts serving impoverished communities, the Environmental Protection Agency, agencies that protect workers' rights, federal agencies' civil rights offices, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the IRS (on top of clawing back funding in the IRA), and so on.

Although appropriations bills are generally kept clean, the extremists have loaded the must-pass bills with demands unrelated to the bill itself. They have put measures restricting abortion and gender-affirming care in at least 8 of the 12 bills. Even if such measures could make it through the Democrat-dominated Senate—and they can't—President Biden has vowed to veto them.

Even fellow Republicans are balking at the attempt of the extremists to get their ideological wish list by holding the government hostage. Representative Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut, the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, told reporters she doesn't see how the Republicans are going to get the bills out of the committee, let alone pass them. "Overall, I think it's going to be very, very hard to get these bills forward," she said.

Far from negotiating with McCarthy over the break, Freedom Caucus members appear to be increasing their demands as a shutdown looms. In August, the caucus announced it would not support even a short-term funding bill unless it also included their own demands for border policy, an end to what they call "woke" policies in the Department of Defense, and what they call the "unprecedented weaponization" of the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. They also oppose funding for Ukraine to enable it to fight off Russia's invasion.

They have hinted they will use procedural votes to prevent any large spending bill from getting to the floor at all. One of the tools at their disposal is a challenge to McCarthy's leadership, which thanks to the deal he struck to get the speakership in the first place, a

single member can bring. Today, Florida representative Matt Gaetz threatened to “lead the resistance” if McCarthy worked with Democrats to fund the government.

They have offered McCarthy a way to avoid that showdown: impeach President Joe Biden, although there is no evidence the president has committed any “high crimes and misdemeanors” required for an impeachment.

Today, McCarthy availed himself of that escape clause. On the first day back from a 45-day August break, rather than tackling the budget crises, he endorsed an impeachment inquiry into President Biden.

This is a fascinating moment, as the Republicans have opened an impeachment inquiry into Biden with no evidence of wrongdoing. For all their breathless statements before the TV cameras, they have not managed to produce any evidence. Trump's own Department of Justice opened an investigation into Biden four years ago and found nothing to charge. As Josh Marshall of *Talking Points Memo* notes, Biden's taxes are public, and a U.S. attorney has been scrutinizing Biden's son Hunter for years; red flags should have been apparent long ago, if there were any.

Just yesterday, Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD) tore apart the talking points far-right Republicans have been using to smear the president. He noted that none of the bank records Representative James Comer (R-KY) has referenced show any payments to President Biden, none of the suspicious activity reports the Oversight Committee has reviewed suggest any potential misconduct by Biden, none of the witness accounts to the Oversight Committee show any wrongdoing by Biden, Hunter Biden's former business associates explicitly stated they had no reason to think President Biden was involved in his son's business ventures, and so on.

This inquiry is not actually about wrongdoing; it is a reiteration of the same plan Trump tried to execute in 2019 when he asked Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelensky to smear Biden before the 2020 presidential election. By launching an inquiry, Republicans can count on their false accusations spreading through the media, tainting their opponents even without evidence of wrongdoing. See, for example, Clinton, Hillary: emails.

McCarthy insisted to reporters that an impeachment inquiry would simply give House committees leverage to subpoena officials from the White House, but during the Trump administration, the Department of Justice issued an opinion that the House must take a formal vote to validate an impeachment inquiry. It did so in reaction to then-House speaker Nancy Pelosi's launch of an impeachment inquiry without such a vote, and the decision invalidated subpoenas issued as part of that inquiry. Pelosi went on to hold a vote and to launch an official inquiry.

It will not be so easy for McCarthy. He has not wanted to hold a vote because outside of the Freedom Caucus, even Republicans don't want to launch an impeachment inquiry when there is no evidence for one. Senate Republicans today were quick to tell reporters they were skeptical that McCarthy could get enough votes in the House for an article of impeachment, and they were clear that a Senate trial was not an option. Representative Ken Buck (R-CO), himself a member of the Freedom Caucus, said: "The time for impeachment is the time when there's evidence linking President Biden—if there's evidence linking President Biden to a high crime or misdemeanor. That doesn't exist right now."

The attack on Biden is a transparent attempt to defend former president Trump from his own legal troubles by suggesting that Biden is just as bad. Russia's president Vladimir Putin today also defended Trump, saying that his prosecutions show that the United States is fundamentally corrupt. His comment made former representative Liz Cheney (R-WY) seem to wash her hands of the modern incarnation of her political party. "Putin has now officially endorsed the Putin-wing of the Republican Party," she wrote. "Putin Republicans & their enablers will end up on the ash heap of history. Patriotic Americans in both parties who believe in the values of liberal democracy will make sure of it."

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) summed up the day: "So let me get this straight: Republicans are threatening to remove their own Speaker, impeach the President, and shut down the government on September 30th—disrupting everyday people's paychecks and general public operations. For what? I don't think even they know."

The center-right think tank American Action Forum's vice president for economic policy,

Gordon Gray, had an answer. Ever since the debt ceiling fight was resolved, he told Joan E. Greve of *The Guardian*, “there’s a big chunk of House Republicans who just want to break something. That’s just how some of these folks define governing. It’s how their constituents define success.”

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Notes:

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[Fritschner/status/1701619550750490725](#)

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[AOC/status/1701662604999926191](#)



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Herb Klinker (FL and Umbria) Sep 13

No evidence. No vote. No spine.

God help us, the insane are running the asylum!

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147 replies



Georgia Fisanick Writes Georgia's Substack Sep 13

The question is are the MAGA crazies in the House a bright and shiny distraction or are they too stupid to understand the grand plan of the Republican oligarchs?

Time for America to get a history lesson about when FDR faced down the "economic royalists".

Some eye-opening reports from Tom Hartmann shed light on this--and Project 2025 is just a revisitation on steroids of what went on when the Republican moneyed interests held government before the Great Depression.

Biden needs to start cribbing FDR's speeches and identifying the underlying threat to democracy--the billionaire republicans who are funding the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society.

Too many Democrats are focused on Trump and Tuberville and MTG and the Proud Boys--the bright and shiny objects. The real threat that needs to be called out is the unelected billionaires that are developing the strategy to take over government. That is what FDR did, That is what Biden needs to do,

Here are the links to two of Hartmann's posts. He writes about this with much more eloquence and knowledge than I have.

<https://hartmannreport.com/p/can-america-take-on-and-defeat-the-425>

<https://hartmannreport.com/p/the-shocking-gop-plan-to-dismantle-e60>

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